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ABSTRACT

By December 1974, it appeared that the growth of faculty unionism in U.S. higher education had definitely begun to slow down. The 1975 turnabout, rejection rates, the nature of the resistance, and the public versus private distinction are reviewed. It is concluded that any future increase in the rate of public rejections and in the four-year college rejection figures would serve to substantiate the hypothesis that a slowing of unionization is likely. Extraneous variables, such as a sudden shift in the economy or the enactment of new National Labor Relations Board regulations, could upset the developing trends outlined here, but other factors lend substance to the statistical argument presented. (Author/LBH)

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DEVELOPING TRENDS OF FACULTY UNIONISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DEVELOPING TRENDS OF FACULTY UNIONISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By December, 1974, it appeared that the growth of faculty unionism in higher education in the United States finally and definitely had begun to slow down. For eight years collective bargaining had been on the rise, but apparently, in 1972, a period of decline began. Fig. 1, for example, shows that since 1971 the number of institutions choosing bargaining agents dropped or leveled each year so that by 1973 the number was lower than that of any year since 1967. By disaggregating the data we see that four-year colleges also chose fewer agents than any year since 1968, while two-year institutions which had started their decline as early as 1970 exhibited a generally downward trend despite a slight rise in 1974 (fig. 2).

Other measures also indicated a slump. For example, in terms of the percentage of institutions of higher education which had organized faculties on campus, 1972 seemed to mark a turning point: two-year campuses dropped from a high of 18.8% in 1972 to 17.4% in 1974, while four-year campuses remained at the 6.9% mark over 1973 and 1974 (fig. 3). In addition, the percentage of unionized instructional staff at all institutions remained unchanged at 14.6% for 1973 and 1974. In fact, the percentage of unionized faculty had increased only about 2% in four years compared with about a 4% increase in 1969 and again in 1971 (fig.4).

Because of the reduced union activity, it was only natural that the number of contracts signed in 1973 and 1974 would also drop. Indeed, the 1974 figure was less than half that of 1971 (fig. 5). Finally, fig. 6 shows that the percentage of all institutions which had unionized--11.3% in 1973--actually declined slightly in 1975 to 11%.[1]

The 1975 Turnabout

No doubt, apprehensive college administrators were relieved at the apparent slowing of the unionization rate. Many observers were led to predict an increasing number of "no agent" victories and suggested that unionization had more or less reached its limit. At least, they predicted, the rate of growth would definitely slow down.[2]

However, when the 1975 figures were in, it appeared that all the predictions had been wrong. 57 faculties chose collective bargaining agents in 1975, making it the second highest year for organizing in the history of faculty unionism.[3] 30 of the agents were from two-year institutions and 27 from four-year colleges, making 1975 the second best organizing year for each category respectively. Thus, the percentage of unionized institutions climbed to a new high of 12.8% while the percentage of unionized instructional staff passed the 15% mark for the first time. Likewise, the percentage of two-year institutions organized surpassed the 20% mark while four-year colleges jumped up a percentage point to reach 8.3%. In short, 1975 seemed to prove that whatever slowing there had been in the previous two or three years was a thing of the past. Indeed, faculty unions had won collective bargaining rights in 80% of the attempted elections.

Rejection Rates Considered

But what about the 20% of the institutions that rejected unionism? Some of the best analyses on faculty unionism to date all but ignore the question of rejections.[4] However, there is much one can learn about future trends of union activity by closely examining the kinds of institutions which have rejected collective bargaining. It may be, for example, that there is in fact a growing resistence to unionism. To see if that is so, one needs to look as much at rejection figures as at growth charts.

Fig. 7 shows the cumulative record of union elections for the past three years divided into union wins and losses. Out of the 367 elections held by June, 1974, only 8% had resulted in a union loss. This means that faculty unions were successful 92% of the time. By the next year, although the number of attempted elections greatly increased, so did the rejection rate. Thus, unions declined in their overall ability to win elections by exactly 2%. Admittedly, that was not much of a drop. Ten months later, however, the win/loss ratio changed again with the overall rejection figure going to 12% while wins dropped to 88%.

Even though rejections have increased at a steady 2% a year since 1973, it is clear that that rate is considerably faster than at any other time in the history of unionism. It took 12 years to accumulate the 29 rejections cited in the 1973-74 summary, indicating

a rate of under three rejections a year on average. But in the last two years alone, 30 faculties have rejected unionism, for an average of 15 per year. This means an increase in the rejection rate of over 625%.

Another way assessing the current momentum of rejections is to analyze election figures for the first half of each year. The advantage of this measure is that it allows us to use data for 1976, and since about half of all elections are held during the first 6 months, we can get an immediate general idea of election trends. Fig. 8 shows a pronounced drop in union acceptance--from 75 and 81 percent in 1974 and 1975 to about 54 percent in 1976. The corresponding rise in rejections was to 46%. This is significant because it shows that unions are conducting more elections in 1976 than ever before but are getting less for their time and money. If there is one thing that is clear from the aggregate statistics, it is that a growing resistence is causing unions to work harder than ever before to realize a net union growth.

The Nature of the Resistence

However, aggregate data cannot reveal the nature of the resistence. Therefore, we must analyze rejection statistics according to the kind of institutions involved, i.e., four-year viz-a-viz two-year and public viz-a-viz private. Historically, unionism has been a phenomenon mainly of two-year institutions such as junior colleges and vocational schools. A 1973 report published by the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education showed that of the 248 contracts then extant, 81% covered faculty at two-year institutions.[5] However, a follow-up report exactly two years later

showed some remarkable changes in the kinds of faculty choosing union agents. As of September, 1975, the percentage of unionized two-year colleges had dropped to 62% with a concommitant rise in four-year unionized colleges to 38%.[6] The percentages vary slightly according to whether contracts or campuses are counted, but overall there is a split of roughly 60% for two-year and 40% for four-year institutions. Obviously it is no longer correct to label the faculty union movement a two-year college phenomenon.

It is important to note, however, that a greater percentage of two-year faculty are organized than are four-year. 20% of all two-year institutions are unionized compared with only 8% of four-year colleges. This is because faculty unions have been organizing, on average, about seven more two-year campuses per year than four-year campuses over a period of eight years. However, since 1971, the year before the slump began, union organizing on four-year campuses has been at about 4 campuses more per year than two-year institutions. In 1973, for example, there were three times as many four-year campuses organized than two-year campuses. It appears from these data that organizing efforts are being directed more and more to four-year campuses.

Does this increased effort in the four-year level of higher education coincide with the increasing rejection rate? Fig. 9 shows a breakdown of union rejection statistics from July 1974 to April 1976. Of the 9 rejections in 1974-75, 75% were from faculties at four-year institutions and only 25% were from two-year faculties. Similarly, in 1975-76, most of the rejections were from four-year institutions--60% compared with only 40% from two-year schools. Cumulative rejection figures for the past thirteen years of faculty unionism support the

differential union acceptance rate suggested by the above data. Out of 59 total rejections, 47, or almost 80% have been from four-year institutions while only 12, or 20% have come from two-year schools. What these data suggest is that attempts to unionize faculties will be met with more and more resistence as unions reach into higher levels of academia. This is not to say that unionization will eventually halt altogether, but it does suggest that greater efforts to unionize four-year faculties may not be met with commensurate successes. With respect to organizing, union leaders must expect a future of diminishing returns.

The Public Vs. Private Distinction

Although faculty unionism is now a shared phenomenon of both two-year and four-year institutions, the same cannot be said of it when the division is between public and private higher education. National Center data for 1973 showed that 90% of all union contracts were with public institutions. Six months and many elections later the figure remained unchanged.[7] A 1975 study showed that of all organized faculty 90% were in public institutions, and that "in terms of institutions, only 2 percent of all private institutions are organized, while about 20 percent of the public institutions have chosen bargaining agents."[8] In short, what these statistics mean is that union leaders can be almost totally confident that an election at a public institution will result in union victory. At least, that is what it meant until 1975.

Prior to 1975 the rejection percentage at public institutions was less than 2% whereas the private rejection count was almost 6%.

Then, in 1975, five public institutions rejected unionism, more than in any one year and only one less than the total number of rejections up to 1974.[9] Of course, keeping with the trend of increasing overall rejections, private institution rejections also increased so that a differential of about 4 to 5% was maintained.

While 1975 witnessed a dramatic increase in public rejections, 1976 will no doubt prove to be even more dramatic. In fact, as of April 1976, union rejections by public institutions had already surpassed the 1975 total. Out of 8 rejections, 7 were by public college faculty, raising the thirteen year union rejection figure by public institutions to nearly 4%. Thus, the public rejection rate is now approaching what the private rejection rate was in 1973.

Conclusion

Of course, it is impossible to predict trends on the basis of only one or two years experience, yet any future increase in the rate of public rejections and in the four-year college rejection figures would serve to substantiate the hypothesis that a slowing of unionization is in the offing. Naturally, extraneous variables such as a sudden shift in the economy or the enactment of new NLRB regulations could upset the developing trends outlined above, but at the moment, other factors seem to lend substance to the statistical argument presented here. These is, for example, the fact that a unionized faculty recently voted to break union ties, and that a major decertification effort has begun at Central Michigan University, one of the first four-year institutions to unionize. There is the establishment of a multi-campus anti-union group called "Concerned Educators Against Forced

Unionism," and the death of collective bargaining bills in about a dozen state legislatures last year. There is the decline in AAUP membership and the instances of student resistence to faculty unions. By coupling these phenomena with the rising rejection figures outlined above one could be lead to conclude that those observers who interpreted the 1972-74 decline as a signal that unionization was slowing down may have been right afterall.

NOTES

[1]This does not mean that actual union growth declined, rather it indicates that colleges were being established more rapidly than they were being organized into bargaining units.

[2]The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 14, 1975, p. 19.

[3]Actually, both 1968 and 1971 tied for a total of 68 union victories, making 1975 a third top year.

[4]See, for example, Joseph W. Garbarino, Faculty Bargaining: Change and Conflict, (new York: Carnegie Foundation, 1975), in which only two pages are devoted to rejections.

[5]National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education, Newsletter, September, 1973.

[6]National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education, Newsletter, September, 1975.

[7]National Center, Newsletter, September, 1973.

[8]Garbarino, Faculty Bargaining, pp. 57-59.

[9]In "Faculty Union Activity in Higher Education-1975," Industrial Relations, (February, 1976), p. 119, Garbarino s s there have been only four rejections up through 1975, which, if correct, heightens the significance of the 1975 figures.

Fig.1
Number of Institutions
Choosing Agents 1971-74

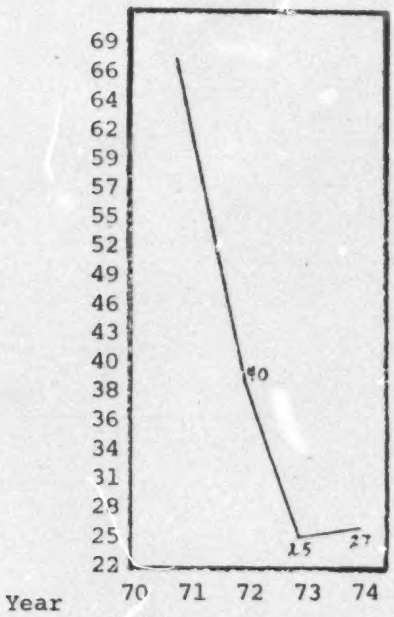
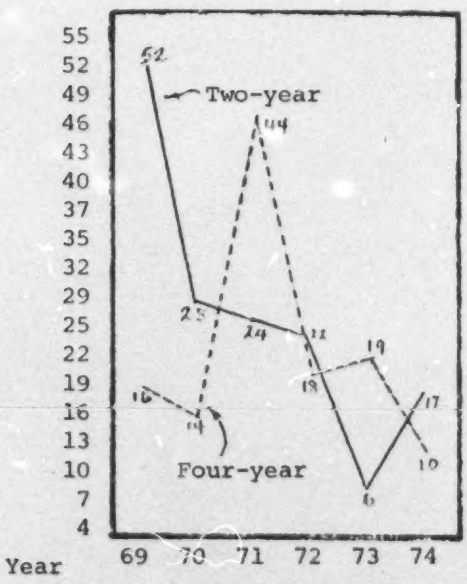


Fig.2
Number of Two and Four-Year
Institutions Choosing Agents 1969-74



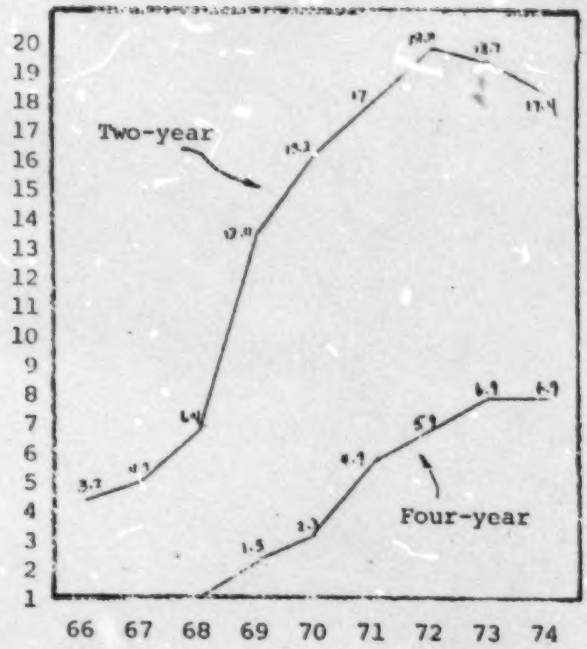
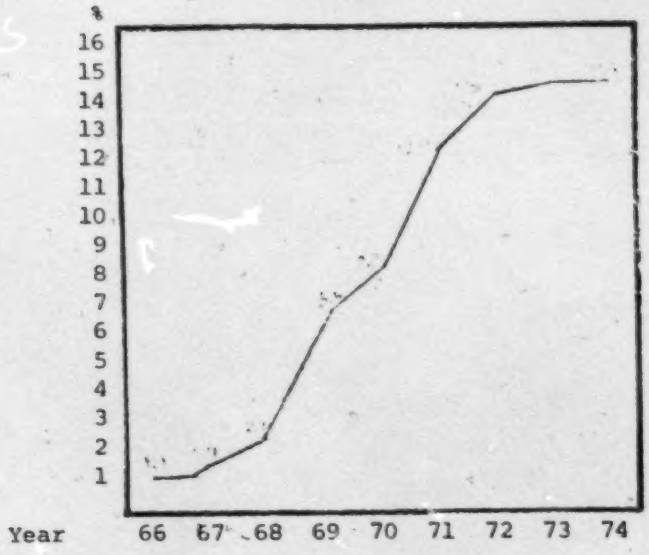


Fig.3
Cumulative Percentage of Unionized
Two and Four-Year Institutions 1966-74

Percentage of Faculty
Represented by Agents-1966-74

Fig.4



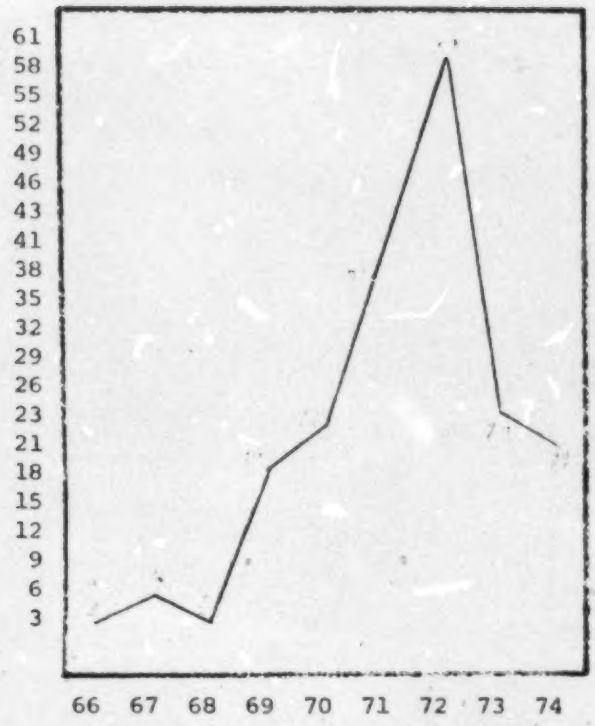
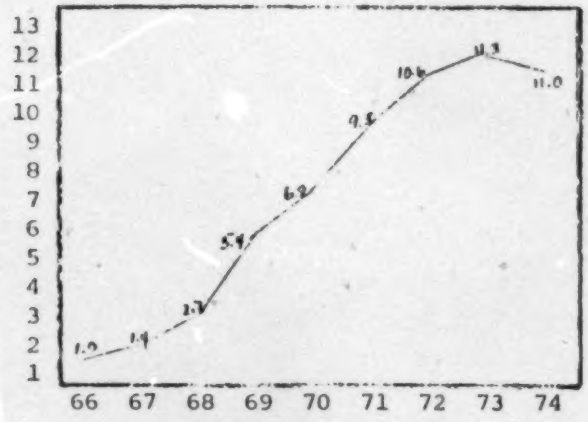


Fig.5

Number of First Contracts
Signed by Year-1966-74

Fig.6
Percentage of Unionized
Institutions by year 1966-74



CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF UNION ELECTIONS FOR ACADEMIC YEARS 1973-76			
Year	Total Elections	%For Union	% Reject Union
July-June 1973-74	367	92.0%	7.9%
July-June 1974-75	426	90.3%	9.6%
July-June 1975-76	520	88.6%	11.3%

Fig. 7

UNION ELECTIONS FOR FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1974-76			
Year	Elections	% For	% Reject
Jan-June 1974	16	75.0%	25.0%
Jan-June 1975	16	81.3%	18.8%
Jan-June 1976	26	53.8%	46.2%

Fig. 8

UNION REJECTIONS BY KIND OF INSTITUTION			
Year	Total Rejections	% 2-Yr.	% 4-Yr.
Up to 1973-74	26	10%	90%
July 1974 - June 1975	9	25%	75%
July 1975 - June 1976	15	40%	60%

Fig. 9